

THEODORE PARKER,

THE REFORM PULPIT,

AND THE

INFLUENCES THAT OPPOSE IT.

A SERMON

PREACHED AT THE MELODEON, NOV. 7, 1852.

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BY JOHN T. SARGENT.

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Published by Request.

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"Be bold for Truth, — though all the world despise;  
Be strong for Right, — though all the world oppose;  
Be free in Love, — though all men are thy foes;  
And God, in love, will bless the sacrifice."

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## S E R M O N.

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Genesis xix. 9. — “AND THEY SAID, STAND BACK !”

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THE proscriptive action of the ruling powers, both in Church and State, towards the interests of reform, is a subject gathering interest every day by the pressing *necessity* of reform in all our social, ecclesiastical, and political relations. Before entering on this, however, I would say a few words on the majesty and the need of that power against which this proscriptive action is mainly directed : I mean the Christian pulpit, the pulpit of the Christian reformer.

You heard eloquent words last Sunday, noble words, about a great man, a great patriot (equivocally great), who has recently passed away, as on the breath of the nation's sighs, from the places that once knew him on the earth. Words of truth, soberness, and pathos, indeed they were. With a power of analysis such as few other preachers could command, with an intrepidity of candor as commendable as it is uncommon, and with a skilfulness of dissection such as evinced the steadiness of the surgical nerve that was brought to bear on the subject, the constituents of a true greatness and the elements of a right patriotism were set before you in a manner and form not soon to be forgotten.

With the force of those words still pressing on our memories, and in contrast with the ephemeral greatness of the

fickle politician, I might speak to you to-day of the *faithful preacher*, — of the need of such a one in these times ; and, to my apprehension, the great preacher, the Christian moralist, the acute moral philosopher, and, above all, the man of consistent virtues, who so moulds the public sentiment, who so analyzes, adjudges, and dissects the *politically* great man, is just so much greater than he, as he wields a wider religious influence and a more diffusive moral power in the community. He discrowns and eclipses the merely politically great man by the greater breadth of his religious principles, the wider range of his moral sense, the greater integrity and consistency of his conscience, the completer discipline, compactness, and precision of his reformatory power. It is not that his influence is wholly destructive, iconoclastic, or epidemic, as he gathers an eager crowd, and carries captive the sympathies and affections of the listening multitude ; though, it must be confessed, he bombards rather fiercely many a consecrated citadel of faith, storms many an old castle of conventionalities, and sends the great battering-ram of his energies with a fatal efficiency against the walls of organized wrongs. It is not that he is thus the popular religious and theological gladiator of the time, that he so rallies around him such an olympic audience. It is, that he so justly weighs all the great questions of morals and duty in the high hung balance of eternal verity. It is that he appeals so to the inward consciousness of men, is so loyal to Christian principles, so lifts aloft and before the earnest vision of his audience the everlasting standard of right, and interprets so effectively the great laws of the spirit of life. It is that he applies religion to all the outward facts and inward experience of life. He thus towers above his peers like some Mount Atlas or Chamouliari above yonder Blue Hills, and all the more because he bears in his bosom greater wealth of granite integrity than they. His great, strong, hearty words, when he speaks of *injustice*, make us

cling to his own secure spirit as to some "city of refuge." They bring a sudden quickness to our pulse, a strange throb to our hearts, and the unwilling tears to our eyes. We wonder why every other teacher does not so magnetize and move us. Our hands close somehow nervously, and are clenched at our sides as if we were feeling for the great sword of Nemesis to revenge the terrible wrongs he so eloquently describes. Sensations unwonted go stirring through the audience like the rush of autumnal winds through the forest-leaves ; and then, again, it is so deathly still that only the tick of yonder clock and the beating of our hearts can be heard. His very look holds us by a mystic spell, as if the spirits of all the pure worlds above us were looking intercessions out of the magic chambers of his own philanthropy. He takes the light of the rising sun of reform first on his own clear forehead, like some great mountain of the Himmalays or the Appenines, and then sends the melting stream of his influence adown, far and wide, on the expectant plains of society. His electric and magnetic influences crackle and coruscate and shoot up around us in the very midnight of our social and political troubles like an Aurora Borealis ; waving and glancing and lifting up encouragements like the purple plumes of advancing legions, or an "army with banners" coming out of the North. And truly, if we do so idolize the great departed *statesmen* of our time, and think them so worthy of our best honors and obsequious eulogies ; hanging out our State banners in their behalf athwart the streets, and the flags of our shipping at half-mast ; calling on our people to go mourning all through the land with muffled drums in long processions ; inviting the eloquent and the learned to do them homage by funereal tributes, and magnifying their very weaknesses into virtues,—what shall we say of him, the fearless moral surgeon of the time, who lays bare the inward spiritual anatomy of such great men, exhibits for a warning to all after

generations their moral maladies, and shows up every nerve and fibre of their inmost being ?

Seeing, as he does, the danger of this popular disease, the unqualified homage which is paid to the worldly great, the disposition to overlook their moral defects for the sake of their political availability, how obviously is it a part of the mission of a true preacher to break the spell of that fatal enchantment; to disabuse the public mind of that monstrous error as to the venial nature of certain crimes, if they are only committed by *great* men beneath the robes of official station ; to show up the fallacy of their mistakes, as of all other wrongs of society ; to tell the “ *plain truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth,* ” even of the *greatest* men, especially when the claim is attempted for their deification ? Seeing also, as he does, how infatuated we have become as to the claims of military chieftains in our government; enthroning them, one after another, in the chief places of power, and turning their very swords into sceptres, — what wonder that *he* should start into his position of protest, and draw *his* sword — the “ *sword of the spirit* ” — ACROSS those bloody blades of the worldly warriors, and, looking them in the face, cry out in the name of God and humanity, —

“ *Hold now ! — Have done ! — In God’s own might  
We gird us for the coming fight !  
And, strong in Him whose cause is ours,  
In conflict with unholy powers  
We grasp the weapons he has given, —  
The LIGHT and TRUTH and LOVE of HEAVEN !* ”

I know the charge of “ coarse denunciation ” is often brought against your minister. We often hear it said his speech and manner are too severe, his rebukes too unqualified, his criticisms on public and private character too intense and searching. Within the last few days, no doubt, you have heard, as I have, his admirable discourse on Mr. Webster called *atrocious*; and, if eloquent uncompromising truthfulness is *atrocious*, so it is. But really in these times, and in

such a crisis of the public sympathy as we are now passing through, when the voices of our pulpits for the last fortnight have been turning one way, monotonously as the prevailing breeze turns the weather-vanes on the top of the spires; when the columns of the public press are overloaded and fatigued with indiscriminate panegyric, it is something like a refreshment to find one pulpit and a preacher honest, bold, truthful enough to be perfectly just on such a theme; so loyal to God that he can suffer no living or dead man to dethrone or eclipse him, and so strong that he can hold up the most colossal image or the heaviest brain which men have ever worshipped, and show that it is but flesh, or a frangible image with its flaws and dark stains, here and there running clear through the marble.

And look you now. Let us be consistent. Is it indeed a public benefaction or a deed of mercy which builds up, yonder on our rocky shores of the Old Colony, the friendly lighthouse,—a beacon signal and a warning to the approaching mariner in the midnight of his risks,—when the precipitous rocks and breakers are all about him? and is it any *less* a charity which quarries out of the very best of New Hampshire granite, or the broken fragments of this great man's fame, such a monument of admonition as may forewarn other adventurers on the great sea of political ambition, and lifts *there* those “*revolving lights*” by which the heedless may have caution lest *they* drift also on the sandbanks of a compromise or the bleak wilds of a disappointment, to become only so many melancholy wrecks on the melancholy shores of human history? Is not he the best friend of his fellows who *lives* ever in their sight the divine life of holiness; who is ever earnest for their welfare; who is willing to breast in their behalf the sweeping tempest of all worldly trials,—some St. Bernard of the Alpine snow-drifts, to whom the driving sleet and blinding snows of the political mountain-pass are as nothing, when

he knows that some poor, fainting brothers are under the avalanche,—some heroic champion of justice, willing to stand and fight single-handed, if he must, the great battle for freedom,—some meek sufferer for the right, standing Christ-like amid the buffetings and abuse of the Scribes and Pharisees, while the reproachful terms *infidel*, *heretic*, *disorganizer*, *blasphemer*, are driven, like storm-gusts, into his face? All this he can bear for the sake of his cherished principles, “love to God, and love to man.”

Such, indeed, is the mission and position of the great pulpit reformer of these days; and what shall we say, then, of such powers and appliances in society as would oppose such an influence, as are ever tending to foreclose and counteract it,—the cold, calculating, case-hardened conservatism which would excommunicate all progress and all freedom of speech, the powers of wealth and the powers of the world, the stringent policy and the intolerant selfishness, which are ever saying to all such lovers of truth and liberty, “Stand back!” Away with your interference! Hold your peace!

This is a subject not without its immediate practical interest to us, involving, as it now does, not only the question of individual rights to the Christian ministry, but all the great practical issues of good to humanity at large. Indeed, the proscriptive action of the ruling powers in society, the Church and State, has become so notorious, so crafty, and so tyrannical,—the exclusive policy of those principalities is now so rife on certain great questions of moral and religious concern,—it has so emasculated our pulpits, so stricken down the arms that ought to be uplifted, so blind-folded or extinguished the eyes of those who ought to be *seers* in these times, that I, for one, must enter again and again my solemn protest against it. Seeing as I do, believing as I do, that no other power bears as heavily as this against the influence which the pulpit of these days *ought*

to be exerting ; seeing how it aims to silence, countermand, and pervert the voice of the ministry which is cowering beneath it, I denounce it as the very Antichrist against which all the advocates of truth have now chiefly to contend. I denounce the wretchedness of the motives which underlie this proscriptive action, the mammonizing influence of our commercial interests, the self-seeking of our political partisans, the stolidity of our sectarian prejudice. And these were ever the antagonisms against which the influences of good, in God's providence, have had to wage their spiritual conflict. See how it was with Christianity at the very first, and how it had to struggle with all the worldly and sensual forces of the time when the meek herald of its majestic truths came to "seek and to save"! There were set over against him all the pride of station, all the powers of wealth, all the craft and sophistry of the world's philosophy ; and all these were saying to him, "STAND BACK!" Who are you, and whence ? was the exclamation of the haughty aristocrat of Judea to the humble Nazarene, when he came out of Galilee with his messages of mercy. "What have we to do with thee ?" and what have you to do with us ?—coming here from your country village disturbing our city, meddling with our institutions, abusing our traditions, setting at nought our sacred laws, denouncing our Rabbis and first men ! "Stand back," with your new views of doctrine and duty, your infidel philosophy, your revolutionizing theory of a "higher law." What do *you* know of any higher law, or what are *we* to know of any higher law, than that of the Sanhedrim or the Areopagus ? What is it to us,—all this doctrine of yours about love to God, and love to man ? "Have we not Abraham to our father ?" What presumption and folly it is for *you*, a humble man, attended only by a few fanatical and obscure Galileans, as infidel and heretical as yourself, to seek to change our social morality and public policy ; telling us of the downfall of our church and

state, forsooth, or that such a fair and beautiful temple as this of ours shall soon have "not one stone left upon another"? Away with you! "Stand back!" "Thou blasphemest." Thus there were set over against him all the ruling powers of the time. There was the Pharisee, with his frigid formalism and his consummate subtlety (the conservative and high churchman of the day); there was the Sadducee, so respectably clad all the time in his "purple and fine linen" (the "merchant-prince" of the metropolis, not over nice in the depth of his religious principles, but a great stickler for order and the Union); and there were the Essenes, a set of ascetic "outsiders," who did not seem to care much about any thing or anybody. All these were opposed to the Nazarene reformer; and no doubt one or more of these respectable gentlemen in Jerusalem went down "on change" the next morning after the great "sermon on the mount," gnashing their teeth, and said the doctrines and sentiments of that sermon were outrageous, incendiary, treasonable, revolutionizing. No doubt they said such a preacher must be silenced! He must be put down! It will never do to have it thus! He must be anathematized; he must be outcast; he must be crucified;— and so he *was*. But, before that crisis came, only see how he projected the generous and noble forces of his own great spirit, like arrows of eternal light, into that community and through all the after-ages. And, as with him, so with his disciples after him. They were persecuted, imprisoned, stoned, interfered with, and in every way reviled. "STAND BACK!" said the cautious, time-serving, and trembling Felix to the intrepid Paul, when he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and a judgment. "You are mad." "You are beside yourself." "You are very indiscreet." "Oh, no!" said Paul, "I am not mad, but speaking only the words of truth and soberness." So, through all the subsequent history of the early church, whose details would carry us far beyond the limits of a single dis-

course, we have similar illustrations of the exclusiveness and tyranny of the reigning powers in any given period. “STAND BACK!” said the Catholic hierarchy and the Roman Dominican Tetzel to Martin Luther, when he advanced on the tyrannies of the mother-church, and put forth his intrepid power to rebuke the sale of indulgences and other Popish iniquities. And what said he to the timid counsel of friends, who advised him not to cope with the ruling powers? “Though there were as many devils in my way to Worms as there are tiles upon the roofs of its houses, I would go there.” And again, what said he when he heard that this same fanatical Tetzel was raving about him, and denouncing him through all the provinces of Germany? “God willing,” said Luther, “I will yet make a hole in his drum.” And, by the blessing of God, so he did,—as the triumph, or at least the progress, of the Protestant Reformation abundantly testifies.

I will not weary you with any accounts of what must be so familiar to you all in the history of those struggling elements in the church: how at one time Protestantism, at another Catholicism, came to the ground as they wrestled and rolled over and bit one another in their efforts for the mastery; and how the spirit of the world has ruled them both, and ran away with their hats, coats, and crosiers, while they were wrestling. I will pass over all this, and come directly down to our own time, and even to so limited a period of our own time as may be embraced within the memory of the youngest of these my hearers; and so may have an especial interest for this occasion. I will refer you, for instance, to what is familiarly known as the “HOLLIS-STREET CONTROVERSY.” Previous to that (perhaps I ought rather to say in connection with that,—say some twelve years ago), the same intemperate power of wealth and conservatism, to which I have alluded, said to the faithful and fearless pastor of that church, who then stood in its pulpit

with the white flames of his grey hairs like a very “crown of righteousness” on his brow, “STAND BACK,” and a truce to your interference with our trade! To such a man, with the honors of half a century on his forehead, and of half that time no less on his ministry,—to such a man, well described by a kindred spirit as

“Girded for a constant strife with wrong,  
Like Nehemiah fighting while he wrought  
The broken walls of Zion, while his song  
Hath a rude martial tone, a blow in every thought,”—

to such a man the influences of the world and the powers of evil, by their persecutions and protests and ecclesiastical councils, have dared to say, “STAND BACK!” But what could they do against the might of God’s truth and the onward omnipotence of his principles, which never yet went backward for mortal man? Look you how that which was sown, if not in weakness, at least amid trials and discouragements, has gathered strength in the compacter sympathies of the people and the now organized force of the Commonwealth’s enactment. Shall we say the pastor of that church had any less than a triumph when he thence departed, shaking off the very dust of his feet?

Again, what said the “Fraternity of Churches,” so called, in this city, to *your* minister some eight years ago, when, by invitation of one of their ministers at large, he entered one of their chapels for the poor on a sabbath? “STAND BACK!” What have *you* to do with this preaching of the gospel to the poor,—with your infidelity and radicalism? You put in jeopardy the interests of our denomination! You injure our credit! We shall lose caste in the sectarian world.

So, also, to their official servitor they said in substance, “Stand back,” and lay aside your office, unless *you* will say as *we* say to that heretical preacher, Stand aside; for we are

*stronger and sounder in the faith, if not holier, than thou!* The result of that remonstrance and of that action is well enough known to you. How it thundered and lightened during that storm of the elements among the timid Unitarians! See how the ark of the Lord in more liberal principles has risen upon the topmost wave, while the frail barks of sectarian bigotry, which opened their batteries against it, have gone or are going down! And now the further consequences of that controversy are *here* in all the noble words that have been uttered from this pulpit ever since; in the rallying of so many kindred spirits and sympathizing souls around this heresiarch of yours, as he has stood here, sabbath after sabbath, through good report and evil report, diffusing a moral influence which none of his adversaries have been able to gainsay or resist; illustrating so many subjects of practical interest by the wealth of his intellect; fulminating a reformatory power, such as no other preacher among us possesses, or pretends to; revolutionizing the popular conscience, far and wide, throughout the domains of the Church and State; striking down the standards of all tyrannical usurpations, and shaking to their foundations all the pillars of a corrupt sectarianism! And, in the firm grasp of such a man, what are all those pillars of a time-serving church? They are as frail as so many reeds shaken by the wind. They are as unsubstantial as the frescoed pillars, painted on these walls behind me. I remember, that, when this controversy between right and wrong began in this city, eight years ago, in the fall of 1844, one of the conservatives of the ministry said to me, "Well, you are taking strange ground in regard to this matter,—the freedom of the pulpit! But never mind; mark you my words. This heretic preacher of yours, at the Melodeon, will have but a short time of it in the city." "Ah!" said I, "and how long, pray, will you give him to live?" "Well, about four months will settle the

matter," he continued. "The public curiosity will then be fully satisfied, and his audience wholly dispersed"!

As I had no very positive evidence that the person then addressing me was a miraculously inspired prophet, you may well suppose I was rather slow to credit his prediction. So I said, "Now let me vaticinate a little. I shall prophesy that in four years, yes, in twice that number, if he lives, that preacher will be found consolidating an influence and an audience such as no other preacher in this city, perhaps not all the preachers put together, can command." That time has now passed; and I leave it to you, friends, to say which of us prophesied right. I am satisfied to rest the issue of my prediction on the fact, that within a fortnight you will transfer your place of worship, not only to a larger "tabernacle of witness," but still nearer to the throbbing heart of this city, which so needs the reforming influences for which I plead.

Talk of crushing or suppressing such a man! Talk of confining or excluding him by any gates or bars of ecclesiastical jurisdiction! Why, he takes all your gates off the hinges! He marches right up and over your barricades, and carries off your prison-doors as Samson bore away the gates of Gaza on his mighty shoulders! His very ink-stand—by the energies which come out of it once a week, like the one which stern old Luther is said to have flung at the head of the devil—is full proof against all infernal agencies. He excommunicates the whole host of bigots and worldlings that mumble their poor words of complaint against him, and so carries us captive by the might of his majestic moral power, that, with every new sound of his apocalyptic trumpet, with every new revelation of truth and duty, we feel, every soul of us, as if we could shout aloud our thanksgiving!

"Such earnest natures are the fiery pith,  
The compact nucleus, round which systems grow:  
Mass after mass becomes inspired therewith,  
And whirls impregnate with the central glow."

As we come to realize more and more the weight and worth of the impressions he is so diffusing through the community, we adopt, without qualification, that glowing apostrophe of Tennyson's:—

“ My hope and heart are with thee! Thou wilt be  
 A latter Luther and a soldier-priest,  
 To scare church harpies from the master's feast !  
 Our dusted velvets have much need of thee:  
 Thou art no sabbath drawler of old saws,  
 Distilled from some worm-cankered homily;  
 But, spurred at heart with fiercest energy  
 To embattle and to wall about thy cause  
 With iron-worded proof, hating to hark  
 The humming of the drowsy pulpit drone  
 Half God's good sabbath, while the worn-out clerk  
 Browbeats his desk below. Thou, from a throne  
 Mounted in heaven, wilt shoot into the dark  
 Arrows of lightnings ! I will stand and mark ! ”

I am well aware that all this eulogy of an individual might seem out of place, and quite superfluous to this audience, were it not fully understood, that in this case I subordinate all merely personal considerations to the great paramount claims of the principles I would thereby illustrate. I have aimed to set forth my views of the principles, obligations, and mission of the right Christian pulpit in these days. If, in so doing, I have seemed to dwell too long on personalities, remember I could not well do otherwise in a description of the faithful and free pulpit. It is because, in my opinion, your minister impersonates, as few others do, the great radical principles of human life and of the absolute religion, that I so speak of him. It is because he represents the great stirring needs of the day as regards pulpit ministrations and moral reform, and because I verily believe no preacher of the present day (in this city at least) has done, or is doing, more to elevate and reinforce popular sentiment and heal the moral maladies of the mass. In view of this positiveness of his moral power, I, for one, have been willing to subordinate the minor questions of

his theology. Indeed, no sufficient argument has yet made it clear that his theology is wholly false. It has ever been with me the principle rather than the man; better should I say, the man of principle. I have so regarded the man only as the exponent of the principle, and I know of no one who better represents it: I mean the principle of **MANLY RESISTANCE TO POPULAR WRONG!** That is it! And, furthermore, *this* much will I say, though they were the last words I had to utter, that, in nothing has the judgment of many well-meaning Christians been so much at fault as in their estimate of this preacher, his spirit and purposes. Let others call him as they will and do,—disorganizer, infidel, deist (it was always so with those who go in advance of their age),—it is enough for me that he is a whole-hearted reformer! There are few enough of such, unhappily, even among the ministry. I say also, that Unitarianism never did a worse thing for itself than when it passed the sentence of proscription on such a man. From the moment it so fell back from the one great principle of the broadest toleration, it received a stroke of paralysis in this city. Its numerical forces here, and its nominal relations everywhere, have continued visibly to decline for the last few years. It has but the mere name to live. Its tendency is downward as a sect; and, like the Whig party, to which it really seems to have some æsthetic affinity, it will be difficult by and by to find out where it is. It has striven to struggle up against this oozing away tendency, by building, at great cost, one or two magnificent and stately churches, which are, after all, insolvent or in the market, or by coalition of one or two feeble churches; but it vainly resists the law of retributive decline, which it has incurred by recreancy to the one fundamental principle of its life,—courageous toleration! It really seemed, at one time, as if this denomination were on the ascending scale among the sects,—a very Protestant among Protestants; but, as soon

as any strong crisis came, putting their boasted principles to the test, ah me! they were just as weak as all the rest. Falling backward "in terrorem" against the legitimate deductions of their principles, they put on the shackles to their own wrists, and passed their own verdict of decline. As to what remains of them, if they continue to build the walls of restriction around freedom of inquiry, as the last king of France did around the city of Paris; if they go on as he did to face down the "reform banquets," then must they also suffer as he did, and be discrowned and banished, while the throne of their distinctions is burnt away from under them! Yes! and you may write this, if you will, among the prophecies of your Bible, no less likely to be fulfilled than many which are there. This inconsistency of the so-called liberals in the church reminds us of what a political orator once said, quaintly enough, about our party promises. He compared them to "western roads which open stately enough, with planted trees on either side, to tempt the traveller, but soon become narrow and narrower, and end in a squirrel track, and run up a tree." What a disappointment do we realize, for instance, when we look, but with few exceptions, to the action or results of any great religious organizations of the time! How little do they promise — how much less do they perform — in regard to the great moral interests and reform-questions of the time! Look, for instance, at the late "Convention of Unitarians" at Baltimore. There was not a word in their discussion from which we could infer that the members of that convention had any interest or concern whatever in those great vital principles that are now shaking the globe. They seem to have been actuated throughout by the most equivocal spirit of compromise, evasion, and sectarian timidity. "Stand back!" seems to have been their edict towards every approximation of those subjects. Look at the three main propositions which formed the basis of their delibera-

tion. The first of them seems almost like a covert satire on the conservative position of the denomination. And this is it: "The harmony of Unitarian Christianity with the Universal Church greater than its contrasts." There is truth in this, greater than was intended; but how much better were it, could they have said rather,—the contrast of Unitarians, in their position as reformers, greater than their agreement with other sects! The second proposition was equally unsatisfactory and equivocal: "The power of our primitive faith; this faith more important than the negations which separate us from others." And the third is like unto it, or little better: "The higher spiritual life, the more earnest missionary spirit and effort (and they might have added, the more courageous reformatory action), which should be the legitimate fruit of this faith." So much for the three propositions of the last Unitarian Convention, the *theses* of a liberal theology. They would hardly have done for Luther to have pinned up on the outer panel of the old cathedral door at Wittemberg; and they certainly would not have alarmed the catholic tyrannies of those days. And was it for this poor talk that the Unitarians of New England, like so many prodigal sons, took what little portion of good has fallen to them, and made their journey into a far country, feeding on husks, and nibbling the old questions of obsolete theologies? Alas for the disloyalty of those who were born to the hope of better things! I come, then, in closing, to the question which underlies and terminates all others in this discourse,—Shall the pulpit be free? Shall the mission of a liberal Christianity, and of the absolute religion, ever be realized? I confess there are some signs which lead me to hope for a better state of things both in Church and State. We have one preacher, at all events,—nay, shall we not say this preacher is one of a thousand?—determined to be heard in behalf of justice, fixed in a resolute purpose to say the right word

for humanity, “whether men will hear, or whether they will forbear.”

Reformers, too, of either sex, we have; a goodly host, working “in season, out of season,” patiently, quietly, but none the less efficiently, by printing and by prayer, by speeches and by self-denial, by secret charities and by open appeal for the correction and guidance of the public conscience, and for the “re-enactment of the laws of God” in opposition to all unrighteous statutes of men. And, God be thanked, they are not laboring in vain.

“The outworn right, the old abuse,  
The pious fraud transparent grown,  
The good held captive in the use  
    Of wrong alone, —  
These wait their doom from that great law  
    Which makes the *past* time serve to-day;  
    And fresher life the world shall draw  
    From their decay.”

It is very evident, from all we see going on around us, that the political parties are in a transition-state. The Whigs have gone, or are going, the way of all pro-slavery flesh; as their great leader, in his dying hours, predicted they would. The Democrats, if they survive the spasm of intoxication consequent on their present success as a party, are none the less doomed, because they have within their body politic the same infernal, cancerous principle of dissolution,—their connection with slavery, and their compromise with the abominable nuisance! They are just as surely predestined to dissolution, as a party, in their present form, or, at any rate, to absorption, in the oncoming anti-slavery sentiment of the next decade of years (which is the same thing), as God is mightier than the **DEVIL**, **HEAVEN** higher than **HELL**, and the “**Rock of Ages**” stronger than the **BALTIMORE PLATFORM**! Thus we shall come to see that such poor obscurities as they were once deemed,—**W.M. LLOYD GARRISON** and his coadjutors (of whom **Harrison**

Gray Otis said they were "only a few very insignificant persons of all colors somewhere up in a printing-office garret with one little negro-boy"),— we shall come to see that such men and such women as have thus labored for humanity through all difficulties and discouragements, holding up the great banner of almighty justice amid many a flag of stripes, have not labored in vain ; leavening, as they have, so largely the popular sympathies, proving such a moral perplexity to all political parties, and blocking the wheels of their Juggernaut car. Still there is work to be done ; quite enough of it for all true-hearted reformers. This incubus of selfish conservatism still overlays and oppresses the church. How else shall we account for that stupid sort of indifference in regard to the great questions of reform,— that uncomfortable neuralgia that seems now to afflict most religious societies ? Comes it not from the oppression and paralyzing influence of sectarian association, party prejudice, self-interest, and worldly expediency ? A poor business it is, truly, so to waste the spiritual forces which ought to be given to God and humanity. The ministry, with but few exceptions, are absolutely dying of timidity ; cringing and bowing down before little miserable cliques and associations, which threaten them with everlasting excommunication and loss of their livings, unless they hold their tongues on certain subjects interdicted by those associations, or unless they vote the same ticket with their parishioners. The combined espionage of Church and State will watch them at the polls and at all the ward-rooms to-morrow, as it watches them in the pulpit, and will penetrate all the envelopes of their suffrage with all the severity of an inquisition ! Oh shame ! shame ! What a miserable slavery it is ! The Christian pulpit, so called ! What a poor, mean thing it is in the main ! It is not unlike that curious toy, the "automaton chess-player," that was exhibited here some years ago. It can cry "check" to no sin, unless the spring

of its machinery be touched by some “Monsieur Maelzel” of a parish committee man, and then only in a kind of thick, smothered voice. The gown of the clergyman, like the robes of that ingenious Turk, covers any amount of complicated wires, cranks, pulleys, springs, and motives, or perchance a living influence curled up somehow in the box. And as, in that game of chess, the real issue is worked out by some other than the wooden man that sits at the desk ; so the pulpit has too often behind it some other influence than the person of its visible occupant. “There are those,” said a late preacher, in his charge to a company of young men about to leave the theological school for the office of preachers, “there are those who would interdict the action of the pulpit on all subjects which have a political and speculative, as well as moral bearing, however obvious and however momentous their moral bearing may be. But, I say, the freedom of the pulpit is a sacred trust committed to your care ; and it were better for you that a mill-stone were hanged about your neck, and that you were drowned in the depths of the sea, than that you should betray it through selfish prudence or fear. The pulpit is, or should be, the moral sense of society, the public conscience, the highest tribunal of the time. When it ceases to be that, let it cease altogether.” And so say I: let the pulpit perish, unless it can be faithful to the moral needs of the time ; and let the ministry meet their consequent martyrdom like men, rather than flinch, falter, or compromise in the least, or for an instant, the clearest convictions of their duty in this matter ; for it *is* clearly their duty to proclaim and pray for “peace on earth, good-will to men.” It *is* their duty to proclaim and illustrate those principles which may tend to the salvation, rather than the destruction, of men. It *is* their duty to bear their testimony in behalf of Liberty, Holiness, Love. So, if the pulpit can stand only as the timid apologist for human or inhuman wrong, I say again, Let it fall : the sooner, the better !

“ But then,” it is said, “ these are secular subjects, party questions, agitating topics,— having nothing to do with the cause of Christ or our spiritual welfare.” Out upon such evasions! And who says that? It were well for such a man that the pulpit is not panelled all round with glass mirrors to exhibit the face of shame he must wear when he so says; ay, to exhibit the image of one who is denying his master; for, surely, Christ felt it to be his duty to preach deliverance to the captives, and the ransom of those who are bruised and oppressed. And, in doing this, *he* felt, and shall not *we* also feel, that the “ spirit of the Lord” was upon him?

What! the ministry have nothing to do in the way of pleading or remonstrance against a monstrous moral iniquity, because, forsooth, it has become popular or nationalized! Must the professing followers of him who came to “heal the broken-hearted” fling aside, and trample under foot, his very dearest principles at the bidding of the world’s partisans? Has it come to this, that, because a nation, or the demagogue of a nation, chooses to put the cap and feathers of their sanction on a great wrong, the ministry of Christ must therefore “stand back,” and see it worrying and mangling the souls and bodies of men with its bloody fangs? Must they retreat and stammer, and never say one word? By the worth of all immortal spirits, and by the might of the omnipotent justice, no, no! Away with such cruel interdictions!

There are now banded, one against another, in these times and in this country, two great antagonistic elements, freedom and slavery, conservatism and reform;— on the one hand, the commercial and pro-slavery interests of the North and South; and, on the other, the anti-slavery principles of all the world. And these two can never be reconciled, never! They are wholly opposite, the one to the other, as light to darkness. They can give no quarter

when they come to the last charge of their bayonets. One or the other must inevitably come to the ground in the struggle which is now going on between them; nor is it difficult to say which, since God is on the side of human rights, while the cause of oppression has nought but the selfishness of man to support it. The mission and duty, then, of reformers is plain: to be faithful, energetic, patient, persevering; undismayed by any sophistry of the selfish, the intolerance of the church, or the array of political powers.

“Fear nothing, and hope all things; as the Right  
Alone may do securely: every hour  
The thrones of ignorance and ancient night  
Lose somewhat of their long-usurped power;  
And Freedom’s lightest word can make them shiver  
With a base dread that clings to them for ever.”

In our supplications to the great Searcher of all hearts, we are accustomed to pray — either with or without some significance to our words — for the coming of the kingdom, the kingdom of our God. From how many temples, from how many altars of worship, is that prayer going up to-day! If we mean any thing by that petition, we must mean, surely, that the spirit and life of that reformer, Christ, may reign upon the earth. We must mean that the spirit and power of God, through the influence and diffusion of all that is pure, wise, lovely, just, and of good report, may have free course, be glorified, and ascendant among the spirits and passions of men. We must mean by that aspiration, that the time may come as foretold in that other rhythmic prophecy, —

“When man his brother shall no longer slay;  
When chains no more shall bind the bleeding slave;  
When legal murder, cursed and passed away,  
No more shall hallow the untimely grave;  
When *Love*, and not *Revenge*, shall deal with crime;  
When *Spirit* shall be Lord, in place of *Sense*;

When man shall not be bound to earth, and live  
Making his God of shillings and of pence ;  
When *Love* and *Peace* and *Equity* shall reign,  
And none shall *starve*, while some are richly fed ;  
When one man shall not hoard his wealth of grain,  
And see his neighbor *die* for want of bread ;  
When earth for every man hath *hearth* and *home*, —  
Then, — not *till* then, — God, will thy kingdom come.”